

STAFF REPORT

To: Planning and Economic Development Committee Date: March 12, 2018
From: Cathy D. Ball, PE., Assistant City Manager
Subject: Charlotte Street Innovation District Process

Summary Statement: Staff is forgoing the monthly general Innovation District Update in order to provide the Planning and Economic Development Committee of City Council a detailed update on Charlotte Street Innovation District process and request Council direction on next steps. The City posts general information on Innovation Districts [here](#).

Review: City Council identified the N. Charlotte Street corridor as an Asheville Innovation District in October 2014. While Innovation Districts were defined as special redevelopment areas where the City coordinates a variety of investments and resources to increase economic opportunities, promote safety and enhance sense of place, the most vocal discussion surrounding investment in the corridor has primarily focused on addressing specific transportation concerns. Some of the transportation concerns are outlined in the four transportation studies that have been created for the corridor in the past 20 years. The recent Council-adopted Asheville In Motion (AIM) Transportation Plan speaks to redeveloping the corridor to include better bicycle and pedestrian facilities. The recommendation reads:

“Primary Opportunities. Bicycle recommendations for Charlotte Street include shared lane markings (sharrows). It is recommended that shared lane markings are placed in the middle of travel lanes and “Bicycles May Use Full Lane” signage installed. A longer-term plan for Charlotte Street could include a road diet with enhanced bicycle facilities. However, this longer-term scenario will need additional feasibility studies.

With surrounding Traditional Neighborhood land uses, Charlotte Street needs a safer, walkable environment. Pedestrian improvements including wider sidewalks and safer roadway crossings should be prioritized.

Current transit conditions include the N route which runs around Klondyke, Montford, Charlotte, and Grove Park. This corridor should remain a priority investment route, particularly since the Montford portion of the N route serves as the northwest connection while the Charlotte portion serves the northeast and terminates at a major destination, the Grove Park Inn.

Primary Implementation Challenges. Existing space challenges exist for the corridor given buildings with frontage directly on the street in some parts of the corridor. The cost

of adding sharrow markings and potential cost of widening sidewalks along the corridor are also challenges.”

Strategic Development Office and Transportation Department staff have engaged with Charlotte Street community members for a little over six months in order to build some relationships with stakeholders in advance of any planning or capital project development process. While this engagement has not been comprehensive, it has included enough input for staff to assess that the implementation of a “road diet with enhanced bicycle facilities” is not fully accepted by the community at this time. A recent non-scientific survey produced by the Charlotte Street Business Association indicates that the majority of respondents would prefer the AIM vision be implemented.

PED members are asked to provide a recommendation to Council regarding the consideration of a process to develop the Charlotte Street Innovation District program.

Staff has provided the following options for PED consideration:

- 1) Road Diet Only: Recommendation that Council provide staff direction to issue an RFQ for engineering services to use programmed capital funds to produce construction drawings to implement a road diet with enhanced bicycle facilities with pedestrian improvements including improved sidewalks and safer roadway crossings, as recommended in the AIM plan. Bike lanes between sidewalks and moving vehicles would create a more pedestrian-friendly environment. Staff recommends that if this option is pursued, that Council also consider directing staff to eliminate the use of the “Innovation District” designation for this area in order to clarify the focus on increasing livability through multimodal improvements (only).
- 2) Corridor Improvement Approach: Recommendation that Council consider allocating up to \$35,000 in general funds to support an abbreviated land use planning process that identifies barriers to economic growth and sustainable development and supports policy reforms like updates to the current zoning for the corridor. Staff recommends that if this option is pursued, that Council also consider directing staff to eliminate the use of the “Innovation District” designation for this area in order to clarify the focus on increasing livability through multimodal improvements. Additional funds will be necessary above and beyond the \$1,250,000 in the current budget to complete this project.
- 3) Tactical Projects Approach: Recommendation that Council provide staff direction to use an amount up to \$1.25 Million in CIP funding for the design and implementation of spot neighborhood safety and streetscape improvements along the Charlotte Street Corridor that are focused on making the area more walkable and bikeable while still maintaining the existing 3 and 4 travel lane configurations. Staff has identified approximately 500 linear feet of sidewalk area that could be improved by either closing an non-operational driveway or by reducing driveways to the city’s maximum permitted driveway width for commercial properties: 36 feet.

- 4) Comprehensive Redevelopment Approach: Recommendation that Council prioritize allocation of general funds up to \$100,000 to work with a broad spectrum of the community to create a vision plan for the Charlotte Street Corridor, using a process similar to the Riverside Drive Redevelopment Plan, Riverfront Redevelopment process, or South Slope Vision Plan. The plan- which would identify goals and strategies for a more comprehensive set of community issues than multimodal service including other infrastructure issues like stormwater management, improvements to land use policies, and other livability issues like public/open spaces and public art and placemaking) can later be considered for adoption by Council and for subsequent (FY 20) use by staff as a guide for use of capital dollar investment. Additional funds will be necessary above and beyond the \$1,250,000 in the current budget to complete this project.
- 5) Reconsideration Approach: Recommendation to Council to reprogram current CIP allocation into another Council goal area.

Other Work

In addition to the larger capital project planning process, City staff continues to respond to Charlotte Street Business Association requests to consider short term transportation safety improvements in the corridor. Staff is currently designing a crosswalk between the Baird and Broad intersections on Charlotte Street. The resulting construction work will be completed by the end of April.

Staff is in the process of evaluating whether the proposed stormwater project at Edwin and Celia should be constructed at the same time the construction on Charlotte Street occurs. Staff will be prepared to discuss this issue at the March 12, 2018 PED meeting.